



TakeCharge

WELCOA'S ONLINE SELF-CARE BULLETIN

What You Need to Know About

GER & GERD

Gastroesophageal reflux (GER) happens when your stomach contents come back up into your esophagus.

Stomach acid that touches the lining of your esophagus can cause heartburn, also called acid indigestion.

Doctors also refer to GER as:

- › acid indigestion
- › acid reflux
- › acid regurgitation
- › heartburn
- › reflux

Having GER once in a while is common. GER that occurs more than twice a week for a few weeks could be GERD. GERD can lead to more serious health problems over time. If you think you have GERD, you should see your doctor.

GERD affects about 20 percent of the U.S. population.

Anyone can develop GERD, some for unknown reasons. You are more likely to have GERD if you are:

- › overweight or obese
- › a pregnant woman
- › taking certain medicines
- › a smoker or regularly exposed to secondhand smoke

What are the symptoms of GER and GERD?

If you have gastroesophageal reflux (GER), you may taste food or stomach acid in the back of your mouth.

The most common symptom of gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is regular heartburn, a painful, burning feeling in the middle of your chest, behind your breastbone, and in the middle of your abdomen. Not all adults with GERD have heartburn.

Other common GERD symptoms include:

- › bad breath
- › nausea
- › pain in your chest or the upper part of your abdomen
- › problems swallowing or painful swallowing
- › respiratory problems

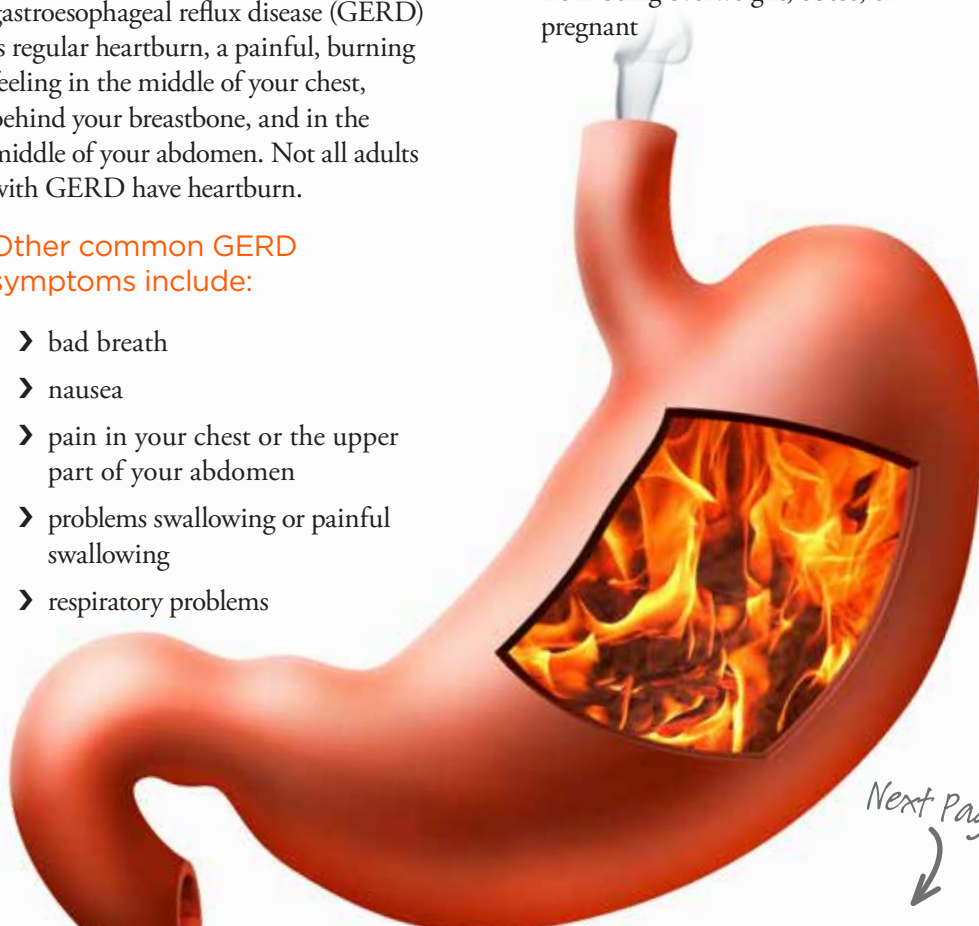
- › vomiting
- › the wearing away of your teeth

Some symptoms of GERD come from its complications, including those that affect your lungs.

What causes GER and GERD?

GER and GERD happen when your lower esophageal sphincter becomes weak or relaxes when it shouldn't, causing stomach contents to rise up into the esophagus. The lower esophageal sphincter becomes weak or relaxes due to certain things, such as:

- › increased pressure on your abdomen from being overweight, obese, or pregnant



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- › certain medicines, including:
 - calcium channel blockers—medicines that treat high blood pressure
 - antihistamines—medicines that treat allergy symptoms
 - painkillers
 - sedatives—medicines that help put you to sleep
 - antidepressants
- › smoking, or inhaling secondhand smoke
- › have problems breathing after vomiting
- › have pain in the mouth or throat when you eat
- › have problems swallowing or painful swallowing

What are the complications of GERD?

Without treatment, GERD can sometimes cause serious complications over time, such as

Esophagitis, which is inflammation in the esophagus. Adults who have chronic esophagitis over many years are more likely to develop precancerous changes in the esophagus.

Additionally, with GERD you might breathe stomach acid into your lungs. The stomach acid can then irritate your throat and lungs, causing respiratory problems, such as:

- › asthma—a long-lasting disease in your lungs that makes you extra sensitive to things that you're allergic to
- › chest congestion, or extra fluid in your lungs
- › a dry, long-lasting cough or a sore throat
- › hoarseness—the partial loss of your voice
- › laryngitis—the swelling of your voice box that can lead to a short-term loss of your voice

- › pneumonia—an infection in one or both of your lungs—that keeps coming back
- › wheezing—a high-pitched whistling sound when you breathe

A hiatal hernia can also cause GERD. Hiatal hernia is a condition in which the opening in your diaphragm lets the upper part of the stomach move up into your chest, which lowers the pressure in the esophageal sphincter.

When should I seek a doctor's help?

You should see a doctor if you have persistent GER symptoms that do not get better with over-the-counter medications or change in your diet.

Call a doctor right away if you:

- › vomit large amounts
- › have regular projectile, or forceful, vomiting
- › vomit fluid that is
 - green or yellow
 - looks like coffee grounds
 - contains blood

